

*Rev. Mr. ~~Durham~~ Wilder,
With the Respect of the
Author.*

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BUILDING OF GOD.

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A

S E R M O N

PREACHED IN THE SOUTH CHURCH, SALEM,

APRIL 6, 1851,

On Occasion of the Death

OF

MRS. REBECCA DODGE.

—
BY REV. BROWN EMERSON, D. D.
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Published for the Family.

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SALEM:

WILLIAM IVES & GEO. W. PEASE, PRINTERS.

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SERMON.

II CORINTHIANS—V: 1.

For we know, that if our earthly house of this tabernacle be dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."

THE Greek particle here translated *if*, might, with propriety, have been translated *when*, and the sense seems to require this rendering. I may also remark, that the word here rendered *tabernacle*, signifies a *tent*, a temporary and moveable habitation, such as the Israelites occupied in the wilderness, and such as are now used in encampments. This makes the contrast more striking. We know that when our earthly house, which is but a tent, is destroyed, we have a building of God, a house not made by the hands of men, or of temporary duration, but eternal in the heavens.

By our earthly house, the apostle evidently intends to represent our mortal body, in which the soul dwells for a time, and from which it is liberated at death. And we are here taught that the soul, or spirit, sur-

vives the dissolution of the body; and that God has prepared a place in heaven for the eternal residence of his children.

The text leads us to contemplate our present state of being in relation to the future. This, to many, is a most unwelcome subject. The skeptic may make it a theme for jest and merriment, and affect to regard the dissolution of this earthly house with entire indifference. But every person of sober reflection enters the meditation of death with deep interest and awe. The grave is the land of darkness, and a thick veil separates between us and the things that are unseen and eternal. We become strongly attached to the objects of sense, and are bound to life by the ties of interest and affection. Our feelings recoil at the idea of sundering those ties and entering an unknown world. These tabernacles of clay, gross and frail as they are, being objects of so much care and instruments of so much pleasure, have become very dear to our hearts. We naturally think of their dissolution with feelings of pain. The thought of their becoming lifeless and ghastly, and then mouldering away and mingling with the dust of the earth, is suited to oppress the mind with fear and dread. Dwelling as we do in a vale of tears, a region of the shadow of death, with his dark trophies hung around on every side, we feel the need of something, that will alleviate the pain and dispel the gloom. But skepticism cannot do it;—philosophy cannot do it. Nothing but a revelation from heaven can give any substantial alleviation. Aside from the information given in this sacred volume, we

should have no certainty of *existence* after the dissolution of the body. Here, and no where else, are life and immortality brought to light. Here alone are sources of consolation opened to the believer in the word of God. These sources are rich and ample.

Unbelievers often represent the religion of the Bible as tending to melancholy, gloom and sadness. But the nature of the case and daily experience and observation prove the representation false. Who has such reason for peace of mind, and even joy and delight, when, to use the metaphor of the text, the lease of his present house is about to expire, as he who has a free grant to an eternal inheritance,—a house not made with hands, secured to him by the promise and oath of the Great Immutable? What comfort must it yield him to know the nature of the purchase,—the certainty of its being obtained,—the price fully paid,—the deeds signed and sealed,—the conveyance legally made,—Jesus Christ, his trustee, in actual possession,—and, for the strengthening of his hope, the enjoyment of a present earnest of the inheritance!

The apostle, in our text, draws a contrast between the condition of a christian while occupying his tenement of clay, and his condition when occupying the house not made with hands. And he presents this contrast for his own encouragement and that of his fellow apostles, and all of every age and country, who suffer severe affliction; especially if they suffer for righteousness' sake. In the chapter preceding that of the text, he says, "We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in

despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body. But though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal." Then follows the text, "For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle be dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."

How did he know this? Because God had revealed it.

As the passage before us was written for the purpose of comforting the Pilgrims of Zion on their homeward journey, I would act in accordance with that purpose by leading their thoughts to that house not made with hands, which is to be their permanent abode, when these earthly tabernacles shall be dissolved. We know that here we have no continuing city,—no abiding place, but we seek one that is to come, a city that hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. That city is described in the two last chapters of the Apocalypse in a most graphic and glowing manner. Though the language employed is figurative, it certainly teaches that the state of the saved, in the future world, far transcends our highest conceptions of its purity, bliss, and glory.

We all know something of the attractions and charms of *Home*, where parents and children, brothers and sisters, with other beloved friends, mingle their hearts together, with unrestrained confidence, in the sweet interchange of thought, sympathy and love.

Now, in many parts of the New Testament, heaven is represented under the symbol of such a *family*. "In my father's house," said the Saviour to his disconsolate disciples, and he says the same to every true disciple now, "In my father's house are many mansions, if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you; and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to myself, that where I am, there ye may be also." What inimitable tenderness and pathos, combined with the sublimity of truth! How adapted to soothe, comfort and cheer the heart under the sorrows and conflicts of this militant state! The idea is conveyed of an immense palace in the celestial city, having innumerable apartments, not all as yet occupied, but daily filling up, and to be ultimately filled.

In that august palace the King of Glory dwells, and his people there behold him face to face, enjoy his immediate presence, and engage in his worship and service without weariness or rest. Think of that happy family, in their father's house, all arrayed in the pure garments of immortality, health, peace and joy beaming in every countenance, their glorious Redeemer bidding them welcome to the richest banquet his love could prepare, while angels wait upon them, and the Master of the house unveils his glory to their enraptured vision.

Some of us have seen, and all have read of magnificent palaces. The temple of Solomon, the most magnificent building ever erected on earth, was so impressive in its richness and grandeur, that when the queen of Sheba surveyed it, she was so overwhelmed that there remained no more spirit in her. But what was that temple compared with the building of God, the house not made by human hands, the palace of the King of Glory? And what is it to be able to say with truth, *This is my Father's house, This is my home!* The temple of Solomon, a dim type of this celestial palace, was long since demolished, and the proudest monuments of earth will crumble to dust; but the inheritance beheld by the eye of faith is incorruptible, undefiled and fadeth not away.

How is a title to this glorious inheritance obtained?

To obtain it, the Son of the Highest must come down from heaven, must become a man, a man of sorrows, must die by the hands of wicked men, bearing our sins in his own body on the tree, must rise from the dead and ascend to the throne. To obtain this title, we must wash our robes and make them white in the blood of the Lamb. Nothing that defileth and maketh a lie can enter within the walls of the New Jerusalem. All who love God and obey the gospel, whatever their rank and condition in life, and to whatever denomination they may belong, will constitute one blessed family; all children of the same Father, to whom and to one another they bear a common likeness; all redeemed by the same precious blood, disciples of the same Master, having the same character

and taste, the same interest, the same privileges, the same enjoyments.

Such, christian, is your home. And since your interest there is so great, with what care and discrimination should you examine your title, and see that you fulfil the conditions, on which the inheritance is bequeathed. If you fail in this matter, you will suffer an infinite loss. And when should this examination be made with more vigilance and prayerfulness, than when about to renew your covenant vows and seal them at your Master's table?

The remarks that have been made, show us the broad and liberal spirit of the Christian Religion.

The gospel teaches, that, in the affair of salvation, there is neither Greek nor Jew, Scythian nor Barbarian, bond nor free. That all, who believe, are one in Christ Jesus, members of the same household, united together by the common bond of love, and fellow heirs to the same divine inheritance. That, though they may dwell in places far remote from each other, may adopt different modes and forms of worship, and be called by different names; yet they constitute one great community, all built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone. And though some of this blessed family are in heaven and some on earth, the connection between them is not dissolved. Death, instead of dissolving the sacred union, makes it more sweet and more perfect.

Heaven and earth brought together as one family. Delightful thought! When a christian dies, he is not taken from this family, but raised from a lower to a higher and happier sphere, where his intellect is expanded, his knowledge vastly increased, his gracious affections purified and strengthened, and his enjoyment unmixed with sorrow. Though gone from us, he is not lost, but gone home to his Father's house,—gone to dwell with his beloved Savior, and to mingle in the society of those who went before him.

How animating the thought, that all the members of the great family of God will, in due time, be brought home to dwell together in the celestial city, in their Father's temple, where they will see his glory without a veil, feel the glowing influence of his love, and all join, with one heart and voice, without a discordant note, in the song of Moses and the Lamb! And what an anchor to the soul is the hope of soon blending *our* notes in that seraphic song! What an unspeakable privilege, to belong to this great family of God,—to join the society of patriarchs, prophets, apostles and martyrs, and all the glorified saints, who have gone to heaven before us, and dwell with them as associates and brethren forever!

O, how should this blessed hope elevate us above this grovelling world, sustain us under these momentary afflictions, and stimulate us to abound in every good work, that we may be prepared for such felicity. If we believe that our departed friends are in heaven, so exalted, so pure, so happy, so honored, how can

we wish to bring them back, or to hold them another
 y from the possession of their inheritance?

If we have evidence that we are children of God, by faith in Jesus Christ, let us think more of our privileges; the honor and dignity of being united, by the most endearing ties, to the King of Zion, in whom dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily; of being under his gwardian care through the whole of our perilous journey; of having the support and solace of his presence in our conflict with the last enemy; and, on the great day, of being owned by him before assembled worlds, and hearing from his lips the sentence, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

You have doubtless anticipated me in applying the views and remarks in this discourse to a beloved mother in Israel, who on the last Sabbath, left the earthly house of her tabernacle to be dissolved, and was received, as we believe, into the building of God, the house not made with hands eternal in the heavens. Her unwavering faith, her decided and consistent piety, and her diffusive benevolence, connected with an amiable disposition and an unspotted life, are the best evidence of her preparation for the change through which she has passed.

Though her departure is a severe loss to her family, to this church and society, to the community at large, and especially to the *poor*, it is a comforting thought, that the loss to *us* is unspeakable gain to *her*. She

has gone home to her Father's house, where she has light without darkness, knowledge without error, holiness without sin, and pleasure without pain.

The purity of her character is well known, and to all, who were favored with her acquaintance, her memory will be precious. Many, whose wants it was her happiness to relieve, will rise up and call her blessed.

While we sympathise with the family under their painful bereavement, we would remind them of the reason they have for gratitude, that such a parent and friend was spared so long to bless them with her counsel, her example, and her prayers. Though dead, she yet lives,—lives in the radiant virtues, which brightened her pathway, and rendered her a centre of attraction to a numerous circle, who will long cherish her memory and feel the effects of her influence. She lives in the warm affection of those lonely widows, whose hearts she has so often made to sing for joy. And the orphan children, in whose education and comfort she was so deeply interested, and the fruit of whose kindness and bounty they have so often tasted, will not soon lose the fragrance of her name.

Her virtues shone in every relation she sustained. The strength of her intellect and the purity of her heart reflected lustre upon each other. As the guide of her household, the inmates bear witness to her practical wisdom, her gentleness, her firmness, and her exemplary walk.

As a *christian*, she drew her views of religion from the word of God. The Bible was her oracle. She

studied it with care and discrimination, received it as an unerring guide, and made it the rule of her life. Rooted and grounded in what she believed to be revealed truth, she remained steadfast to the end. The way of salvation through the mediation of Jesus Christ is a theme, on which she delighted to dwell. Her views of the holiness of God and the purity of his law, led her sometimes to self-distrust. But in the trying hour her mind was resigned and tranquil, and in this peaceful state she fell asleep.

“Blessed are the dead, who die in the Lord.”

HYMNS

SUNG ON THE OCCASION



THE DEATH OF THE RIGHTEOUS.

How blest the righteous when they die,
 When holy souls retire to rest !
 How mildly beams the closing eye !
 How gently heaves th' expiring breast !

So fades a summer cloud away ;
 So sinks the gale when storms are o'er ;
 So gently shuts the eye of day ;
 So dies a wave along the shore.

Farewell, conflicting hopes and fears,
 Where lights and shades alternate dwell !
 How bright th' unchanging morn appears !
 Farewell, inconstant world, farewell.



THE HEAVENLY REST.

There is an hour of peaceful rest,
 To mourning wanderers given ;
 There is a joy for souls distressed,
 A balm for every wounded breast,
 'Tis found above—in heaven.

There is a home for weary souls,
 By sin and sorrow driven ;

When tossed on life's tempestuous shoals,
Where storms arise, and ocean rolls,
And all is drear but heaven.

There, faith lifts up her cheerful eye,
To brighter prospects given ;
And views the tempest passing by,
The evening shadows quickly fly,
And all serene in heaven.

There, fragrant flowers, immortal, bloom,
And joys supreme are given ;
There, rays divine disperse the gloom ;—
Beyond the confines of the tomb
Appears the dawn of heaven.

